

# Recalling a Great Terre Haute Journalist

By Edward Price Bell

JUST a glance at Spencer Ball as I look at him in the mirror of my memory.

Just that and a few reflections on the profession to which he gave grace and honor.

Such is the compass of this article.

Terre Haute has had, and still has, journalists of vigor, principle, and distinction. This old city on the Wabash may not be a metropolis, but no metropolis, in my opinion, ever embodied sharper individuality than it. Individuality, after all, is not a matter of population statistics. It is not a matter of size. It is a matter of quality. And not the least of the city's elements of quality has found expression in its journalists.

Of the history of these publishers, executives, and writers I am neither competent nor inclined to be the chronicler. It is a story requiring a great deal more knowledge than I can pretend to have. But I do have some vivid memories of journalism, and of journalists, in Terre Haute; and of these I have a desire to write sketchily.

George Allen I knew well. He was the editorial soul, for a time, of the *Express*. He was a charming man and a fine journalist, handsome, large-minded, devoted to his profession, unafraid. Not only his associates but the city mourned when he died. His chief editorial writer, Mr. Oakey, brilliant and humorous, I also knew well. And his managing editor, Bill Fishback, sour, sarcastic, and capable.

Most picturesque perhaps of the Terre Haute journalists of my day was brown-haired, brown-mustached, dark-eyed, angular-faced, muscular, gifted, lovable Douglas Smith. If Doug liked anything better than his profession it was a fight. And how handy he was with his dukes! One day at the county fair I saw him eyeing closely a burly brute of a man who was bullying a little fellow, obviously badly scared. What the row was about Doug had no idea, but suddenly, just as the big man was squaring away to hit the little fellow, Doug sprang between them. Next I saw the big man flat on his back on the lush grass and heard Doug saying:

"Now get up, and I'll knock you down again."

Not too bad a sport, the big man smiled wryly and said: "Not today, thanks!"

Douglas Smith, for brains and for decency in journalism, died long years too early!

Many other delightful writers I knew in the Terre Haute newspaper field. Among the really talented ones Frank Parks stood high. He was, and is today, a natural writer. His nose for news was as keen as that of anyone who ever trod a reporter's beat, and his writings always bore some touch of his own emotion, some effect of romance. I have worked with him on night police. I have worked with him on law-banned prize-fights which carried us into places hidden and remote. I salute a great reporter!

Joy of my life, now and again, in Terre Haute newspaper work was a weather-beaten man from Clinton, Mont Casey. Mont's other name was wit. I doubt if he ever wrote a dull line in his life. To even the immorality and squalor and misery of the city he gave some color of merriment. You may, or may not, know what a police court is like, especially on a Monday morning. I can tell you that, to most eyes, it is a very drab proposition. To Mont Casey's eyes it was different. His wit made it different. He turned pathos into fun. He made the drab scene sparkle like a racing brook in spring!

Of other fascinating colleagues I could write, and should love to write: of Charley Reeves, nifty city editor; of Herby Jones, forceful, pushful, hard-as-nails reporter; of Shorty Goodridge, brilliant dramatic critic and all-round newspaper man; of Curt

## THE SCRATCH BOX

Tell . . . Not Ask

● For several months the controversy over hours for labor has been battered around in Congressional halls. Congressmen looking toward the thousands of votes accorded them by the laboring man, make excuses, alibi, uphold the forty-hour week, and uphold the general labor practice. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred these same Congressmen have not been in the field to talk with laborers since they first made the great political race (sometimes considered a race in itself separate from the white, colored, or Mongolian race).

E. E. McNaughton, publisher of the *Pekin (Ill.) Daily Times*, offers an outstanding suggestion toward the solution of the labor problem. He writes "Instead of a hard and fast, short-sighted 48-hour week, let's have a boss of labor—a man with power, if necessary to say 'It's 56 hours, or 70 hours,' and with authority to reach right into my Times plant and grab my best men. And in heaven's name, let's not have Franklin D. Roosevelt as that boss of labor! Excepting 1924, Roosevelt has been candidate for governor, vice president, or President in every national election for the last quarter century. He can't help thinking in terms of votes! The labor boss should be a man who cares no more for votes in his handling of labor than Nelson does in handling business."

In a letter to Publish McNaughton from one of his subscribers, one sentence stands out: "Is it the idea of our government that it is more important to preserve labor unions than it is to preserve the American Union?"

The laboring man is willing to work as long as he is needed, at straight time. It is by-and-large the labor leader who is thinking of the additional revenue for his organization's coffers, which in turn keeps lobbyists in Washington to strangle any outbreak against labor, who insists on a short work week with double time over-time.

No, labor is not completely to blame. Capital is doing its share of blocking a thorough and complete all-out production. That dollar-sign is too powerful to ignore. The waving of the Stars and Stripes does not bring a knot in their throats, and pride in their hearts.

These two large factors in the war effort have come in for plenty of criticism, but the American people are basically at the root of the evil. We buy bonds and bonds, but some of them, in fact millions of dollars worth, are cashed-in in sixty days. Publicity has been given large groups who purchased hundreds of thousands of dollars in bonds—but nothing was said about them being cashed-in two months later.

It is easy enough to call names and place the blame in the weak spots. But to stand up and take that criticism and turn around and correct the mistakes and evil, is something we Americans have done for centuries. It's time that was being done now, and laws, rules, and regulations won't do it. It must come spontaneously, of free mind and will. Let's stop calling names and get down to the brass tacks and make this war as short as possible so the fruits of inventiveness of the war may be enjoyed in peace.

Shattuck, half printer, half reporter, master of crude drolleries, a humorist on his death-bed. But I must move on to the great journalist who gave me my first job as a writer, and whose character and mind left an indelible impression upon my life.

Spencer Ball I saw for the first time in his counting-room, the counting-room of the *Gazette*, the evening paper which he and his brother William made a notable organ of news and opinion not only in Terre Haute but throughout Indiana. The *Gazette* office was in a two-story brick building on the west side of Fifth street near Ohio. I had passed it many times, and often had stopped to look it over, for in some way out of the mystery of inheritance I had got the idea that one day I should be a newspaper man.

Queer enough this idea was. It was just as queer as my brother Will's idea that he was born to be a surgeon, as he eventually was in Terre Haute. We were not only farm boys but frontier boys, for in those days the Raccoon Valley sixteen miles northeast of Terre Haute was pretty nearly stark nature. Will never had seen a surgeon. I never had seen a writer. How we respectively were drawn by nature away from the plow to the scalpel and the pen I leave to those scholarly persons who know vastly more about the human animal, in body and in mind, than I know.

On a certain bright morning, in any event, I opened the front door of the *Gazette* counting-room, holding my courage in both hands, and walked in. I was aged 13 and all dressed up. I had on my first tailor-made suit, and was I conscious of it! In the left lapel of my coat was a particularly showy button-hole bouquet. Timid as I was, I did not feel wrong intruding. I had farmed. I had "cubbed" in Zimmerman's drug store at Thirteenth and Main streets. I had "butched" on all the railroads out of Terre Haute. I really felt quite a citizen of the world.

But there must have been something very funny about me.

Behind the high counter, at any rate (a counter somewhat higher than my head) stood a lean, keen-visaged, dark-eyed man, manifestly an uncommonly kindly and polite man, who did not seem to be able to keep his face straight. I gave it up. I realized that in spite of all my outward adornments I was still recognizable as fresh from the Raccoon. I put the painful fact down largely to my tousled blond hair, which no comb or brush ever had been able to tame!

That man of striking figure and mien behind the counter was Spencer Ball. He overlooked everything and gave me a job as a reporter. Then he promoted me to free-lance featuring on the steamboat life and the house-boat life of the Wabash River. All I knew of writing, virtually of spelling, he taught me. He labored with me over my wretched copy at night. But he taught me far higher and better things than how to be a passably good reporter and how to spell the simplest words of our language. He taught me the ethics of journalism. He revealed to me the dignity of journalism, its importance, its political and social responsibility, its indispensability to a free and progressive civilization. Long years later, when I lived with my family in London, and was general manager of the special foreign news service of the *Chicago Daily News*, Spencer Ball and his lovely wife visited us at our home in Kent, and many a happy hour we had motoring together and talking of old times on the Wabash.

Some great journalists I have known in my day, foreign and American. But I never have known one who was greater in all the essentials of the profession than Spencer Ball of Terre Haute.

BALL Family. (BALL, William Creighton)

PAMPHLET FILE

Emeline Fairbanks Mem. Library

INDIANA ROOM

September 17, 1964

Miss Mary L. Pearson  
Reference Service Librarian  
Ball State Teachers College

Dear Miss Pearson:

The William C. Ball you found mentioned in Beckwith's "History of Vigo and Parke Counties" is the man who served on the State Teachers College Board in 1919. I have copied the information about him which appears in "A Biographical History of Eminent and Self-made Men of the State of Indiana", pub. in Cincinnati in 1880, V.2, 8th Dist., p.1:

BALL, WILLIAM CREIGHTON, journalist, of Terre Haute, was born at Terre Haute, December 27, 1846. His father, William James Ball, was an old resident of Vigo County, and for a long time actively identified with railroad and similar enterprises in that section of the state. He was resident engineer of the Wabash and Erie Canal, engineer of the Indianapolis and St. Louis Railroad, constructing engineer of Evansville and Crawfordsville Railroad, and receiver of the Richmond and Logansport Railroad. Mr. Ball's mother, whose maiden name was Julia Sterritt Creighton, was a native of Chillicothe, Ohio, where her family have long been very prominent, her father having been for many years member of Congress from that district. The Ball family are of Virginian extraction. After receiving his early training in the private and public schools of Terre Haute, William C. spent one year at the Indiana State University, and afterwards finished a literary course at Amherst College, Massachusetts, whence he was graduated in 1868. For the succeeding three years he taught in a high school at St. Louis, Missouri, and, during the same period, studied law in the Washington University Law School in that city. In 1871 he returned to Terre Haute, and November 1, 1872, purchased the Terre Haute daily and weekly Gazette, with which he has since been connected." (Of this publication he became editor and proprietor, first, in association with John S. Dickerson, and later with his brother, Spencer F. Ball.) "His paper is devoted strictly to the advocacy of the principles of the Democratic party, and is universally acknowledged to wield a powerful influence among the members of the party in that section of the state. While thus outlining his policy, the editor, in his editorial department, can not be said to be trammelled by party machinery, as in local affairs he is thoroughly independent and non-partisan in his comments on matters of public utility. Never a candidate for political distinction himself, he is an unflinching supporter of the leaders of his party with pen and voice. While dis-

claiming for himself any record worthy of mention, and refusing to recognize himself as entitled to the honor, his friends insist upon his right to a seat among the representative men of his native state; and his marked ability, and unquestioned position as a journalist wielding more than ordinary influence, entitle him to this distinction. He is still (1878) unmarried."

Much the same material may be found in Oakley's "History of Greater Terre Haute and Vigo County", pub. in 1908. I copied some material which appeared in his obituary which was in the Terre Haute Star Sunday, May 28th, 1922.

"William Creighton Ball died at his home Saturday May 27, 1922 after an illness of several months. He was 75 years old last December.

Perhaps there has never been a man more prominent in the life of the city of Terre Haute in the educational, business, civic, social and cultural lines than W. C. Ball. There was never an activity of any kind that tended for the betterment of Terre Haute to which Mr. Ball was not found contributing his time and energies. .H.....

He was president of Rose Polytechnic board for many years; a member of the penal Farm board; Secretary of the Indiana Normal School Board;; board member of the local Red Cross, of which he was president for a number of years. He was an interested member of the Tuberculosis Society, which he aided in organizing some 10 years before his death, and a member of the Society for Organizing Charities, of which he held the presidency for a number of years. In recent years, Mr. Ball's interests have been concentrated to a more or less degree upon the new Rose Polytechnic Building and the Penal Farm. He was one of the early advocates of prison reform and the Penal Farm represented one of his ideals. He was deeply interested in social problems of all kinds." He joined the Rose Polytechnic Board in 1883, after the death of Chauncey Rose, and continued as a member until his own death in 1922. He became president of the Board in 1900, and after that time passed out diplomas to the graduates every year with the exception of two. He wrote the history of the early board of managers and the general history of the institute for the Memorial volume which was published in 1908 and 1909.....



# Ball State Teachers College

Muncie, Indiana

The Library

September 16, 1964

Mr. Stillman Taylor, Librarian  
Fairbanks Public Library  
Terre Haute, Indiana

Dear Mr. Taylor:

Dr. Emens, our college president, has asked us for biographical information about William C. Ball, of Terre Haute, who was on the State Teachers College Board in 1919. In Beckwith's "History of Vigo and Parke Counties", p.117, we have found a reference to a William C. Ball who in 1872 bought jointly with John S. Dickerson, the Terre Haute Daily and Weekly Gazette. This William C. Ball may have been the father of the William C. Ball who served on the Board. We have found no other reference to a William C. Ball of Terre Haute.

We thought it possible that you might have some material in your library about the Ball family of Terre Haute. If so we would greatly appreciate any information you can send, or references to material about the William C. Ball who was a member of the State Teachers College Board.

Thank you for any help which you can give us.

Sincerely,

*Mary L. Pearson*

Mary L. Pearson  
Reference Service Librarian

MLP:pa

n are furnished in Terre  
D. A. Asbury, general de-  
rk at the postoffice.

## O. K." ON THE BOOKS

Club Arranges for Smoker to  
Be Held Thursday.

quarterly meeting of the Ger-  
o the report of the auditing  
e was received. The accounts  
he secretary and treasurer up  
st of February were found to  
fect order.

mmitted was authorized to  
accounts of the fair commit-  
r this is done the funds avail-  
be turned over to the follow-  
es elected at the same meet-  
Tetzel Sr., Herman Raabe and  
Rahm.

ib ordered the reception com-  
make preparations on an  
scale for a "smoker." and  
was the date set for the en-  
nt. It is intended to make  
t a happy one.

## IN PITIABLE FLIGHT

Dead, Seven Children Sick and  
Father Out of Work.

case is that of the Ivey family  
South First street. William  
father, has been out of work  
time and all of the seven chil-  
down with the measles. The  
died of measles Friday night  
t of the children are in a se-  
dition. The funeral of Mrs.  
be held at the residence at 10  
his morning, but necessarily  
private. The burial will be at  
Cemetery.

## SPECIAL GRAND JURY

Arbuckle Wants Gambling  
Liquor Cases Investigated.

i, Ill., Feb. 8.—State's Attorney  
announced today that he  
sk Judge Craig for a special  
ry at the February term of  
take up an investigation of  
g, illicit sale of liquor and the  
away of witnesses in liquor  
f the request is granted it will  
sary to call a special body of  
rs, as the board of supervisors  
o provision. Seven prisoners  
ounty jail are awaiting the ac-  
the grand jury.

Mont Ada Brina Results

**LOT 3**—Black Taffeta Silk, regular  
width, Wednesday a yard . .

**LOT 4**—Black Taffeta Silk, 27 inche  
grade, worth \$1. Wednesday a

**LOT 5**—Black Taffeta, 20 inches wid  
75c value, Wednesday a yard .

**LOT 6**—Big Lot Fancy Silks, Broc  
etc. Values up to \$1.00 per ya  
priced for Wednesday a yard .

## Worked Life Time on Big Bedstead

A unique and handsomely made  
bedstead is responsible for curious  
sightseers at the store of Phil Fran-  
zel in North Third Street. The bed-  
stead was made by William Ball, an  
old Terre Hautean, and is said to have  
taken him all his life to put it to-  
gether. He has added improvement  
on improvement until he was satisfied  
with the result.

The bedstead which stands 12 feet  
high at the head is of walnut, brass  
and bronze. It is finished in gilt and  
is composed of separate pieces that will  
come apart if required. Brass chains  
and fittings, bronze figures, and other  
ornaments go to make it an imposing  
piece of furniture.

Franzel, who has been offered large  
sums for it, says he was two weeks  
taking it to pieces and cleaning it. He  
says he intends to place it in the first  
exhibition that is held. Along with  
the bedstead is a bronze and brass  
chandelier that fits over the top of the  
bed.

## LITERARY CLUB PAPER.

Rev. H. H. Wentworth of the First  
Congregational Church of this city will  
read a paper before the Terre Haute  
Literary Society Monday evening. His  
subject will be, "The Religious Value  
of the Gospels Narrative."

## Y. W. C. A. Note

The Women's Bible Club, which  
been meeting Monday mornings at  
o'clock at the library under directio  
Mrs. S. C. Stimson, has changed  
meeting time to Tuesday morning.  
who are interested in Bible study  
asked to attend.

Mrs. C. Hemans will lead th  
o'clock meeting at the Y. W. C. A.  
day. Miss Effie Dobbs will sing.

## TEACHERS UNITE IN SESSI

Three Townships Represented at In-  
stitute in Court House.

A joint teachers' institute was  
at the court house yesterday. Al-  
50 teachers were present, represen-  
Honey Creek, Lost Creek and Harr-  
Townships. Each township usu-  
holds its meeting separately  
month, and it is seldom they unite  
was done yesterday. An excellent  
gram of readings, recitations and  
sic was provided.

## STATUTORY CASE IS ENDE

PARIS, Ill., Feb. 8.—When the S  
rested in the trial before Justice H  
ard today of the statutory case aga  
William Hipsher, the counsel for  
defendant announced that his cl  
would marry the prosecuting with  
Miss Pearl Darden. The marriage  
performed by Justice Howard.



# Prominent Resident Foretells Future

By DOROTHY J. CLARK

The recently released population figure of over 72,000 for the city of Terre Haute, after the latest census count, brought to mind the predictions of the late Spencer F. Ball. It's always interesting to compare predicted events with later statistics, after the proper time has elapsed between the forecaster's opinions and the actual happenings.

In 1913 the TERRE HAUTE TRIBUNE carried a special feature article by Spencer F. Ball entitled, "Terre Haute Fifty Years from Today," in which he compared the city of 1913 to what it was like fifty years before, in 1863, and predicted what he thought it might be like fifty years hence in 1963. Although we are five years short of his predicted goal, we can see how close he came in some instances and how very far off he was in others.

Mr. Ball began his remarks by stating that "it will be well to remember that but a handful of those Terre Hauteans who were adults in 1863



are still living, or if living, are still residents here." "Of the ministers of that day, there remain none; of the lawyers one, Judge I. N. Pierce; of the teachers one, Wm. H. Wiley; of the publishers and printers none; of the doctors one, S. J. Young; of Wabash Avenue merchants two, H. Hulman and F. W. Hoff; of county officials one, John D. Bell; of bankers two, Preston Hussey and D. Deming; of manufacturers none; of contractors none; of artisans in general, a mere handful. So, we may infer that, by 1963, practically every adult who is now a citizen will have removed from this city or passed over the Great Divide."

Mr. Ball obviously did not take into consideration the fact that as health conditions improved, people would live longer, and that many adult citizens of 1913 would be hale and hearty fifty years hence.

His next statement is both true and false. "What is true of men and women is true also of buildings. With about ten exceptions, every structure standing on Wabash avenue from Sixth street east to Blake hill (we know this as where Highland Lawn cemetery is now) in 1863 is now gone; and the same proportions of change hold on all the residence streets. Only two hotels standing in 1863, the Terre Haute House and the Peyton, formerly Buntin House, are still used as hotels. We may expect, therefore, that fifty years hence Terre Haute will be practically rebuilt." In our downtown area there are very few new buildings, but farther east on Wabash there are many new structures to verify Mr. Ball's prediction.

## Population Prediction.

In 1863 Terre Haute's population was 11,000; in 1913 it was 63,000; in 1963 Mr. Ball expected it to exceed 200,000. Well, we can see how far off this prediction was unless we can gain about 128,000 in the next five years!

"Fifty years ago (1863) Terre Haute was chiefly an agricultural point; manufacturers, except pork-packing, brick-making and flour-milling, were negligible. The nail works and blast furnace which gave the town its manufacturing impetus, came in '67 and '70. Now Terre Haute ranks second in the state in manufactures; in 1963, including its mining industries, it will rank first." In truth, Terre Haute in 1958 ranks about seventh in the state in this respect.

## School Comments.

"Fifty years ago the public schools were barely started; now they have added vocational to cultural training; fifty years hence they will have long been, in every sense, real social centers. Fifty years ago there wasn't a public library in town; now there are three; in 1963 there will be one in

every school house." Actually, there are main library, branches at McLean, Sarah Scott, Meadows Center and Union Hospital, besides one bookmobile, with another one starting service in September.

"Fifty years ago there wasn't a paved street or a sewer in town; now there are 25 miles of paved streets and 70 miles of sewers; in 1963 every street within the city limits will be paved with something both noiseless and dustless (did he mean blacktop?), and every house will have sewer connections. Fifty years ago the streets were cleaned once a year; now they are cleaned oftener, but poorly; long before 50 years every paved street will be cleaned daily by automobile combination sweeper and vacuum."

## Incorrect Forecast.

This next prediction is way off! "Fifty years ago there wasn't a foot of street railway track; now there are 32 miles within the city; in 1963 every section of town will be served by car lines and there will be a dozen interurbans instead of four, and the tracks of at least the city lines will be owned by the municipality." Terre Haute has neither street cars nor interurbans. The tracks of both have long since disappeared.

"Fifty years ago Terre Haute needed new hotels; now it still needs them; is it too much to hope the need will be supplied within 50 years hence?" What would Mr. Ball have thought of our modern motels, complete with television and air-conditioning?

"Fifty years ago we used to some extent the stage coach; now the auto; by 1963 will the aeroplane have become a back number?" The answer to this question might be, "Not quite."

"Fifty years ago the Wabash River front was lined with large freight and passenger steamboats; now it is lined only with small passenger motor boats; 50 years hence it will be crowded with modern barges, tugs and motor boats."

"Fifty years ago there wasn't a public park here; now there are

five; in 1963 there will be one at least in every ward and several large ones, including Forest Park of 370 acres, which will then be inside the city limits. Fifty years ago the whole town was a playground; now there are practically no public playgrounds; in 1963 there will be a real one attached to every school house."

## Smoke—Then and Now.

"Fifty years ago we saw little or no smoke; now we can see little else; fifty years hence the smoke will have been vanished so long we will read with horror and incredulity of the smoke-begrimed days." Oh, if this statement were only true!

"Fifty years ago the labor unions here were so few in numbers and so poor in purse that a small back room was all they needed or could afford; now they are so numerous they need, and so prosperous they can afford, to build a Labor Temple; fifty years hence they will require several such." The new buildings Mr. Ball predicted are those erected by the plumbers on North Thirteenth, the carpenters on North Third, the mineworkers on North Eighth and the operating engineers at Third and Margaret.

"Fifty years ago we were in the midst of a great contest over problems growing out of slavery; now we are in a ferment over problems growing out of socialism; will there be quiet contentment in 1963? Certainly not, for always there will be wrongs to right, new things to learn, new ills to cure, new fields to conquer, new heights to scale."

A Sunday  
August 31, 1958